



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Refuge Highlights

**April 2020:** *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is presently located in twenty-two different locations in the four primary Connecticut River watershed states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge is located in ten locations on the mainland and near shore islands along the northern shore of the Long Island Sound in Connecticut.*

#### Celebrating Our Volunteers



Photo Credit: USFWS

Each year in April we celebrate National Volunteer Week. Unfortunately, we could not be together in person this year to honor these amazing people who do so much for the refuge and the community. But Stewart B. McKinney staff did not let this stop them from virtually honoring their volunteers with a shout out to them through social media. *"Thank you so much for your dedication throughout the years, and at this time of social distancing we REALLY miss working with you. We send all volunteers our love and good wishes. We hope to have you working by our sides again very soon!!"*

For more information contact: [Shaun\\_Roche@fws.gov](mailto:Shaun_Roche@fws.gov)

#### Spring Brings New Life To Fort River



Photo Credit: Bill Thompson

Check out this informative tribute to the Fort River Division, written by one of our Regional External Affairs staff, Bridget Macdonald. In her blog, Macdonald highlights the array of benefits and resources that Fort River offers for diverse species of wildlife, while highlighting the opportunity the refuge offers to connect people with nature and the outdoors. You can access the story on the Region's Blog Page: <https://medium.com/usfishandwildlifeservicenortheast>

For more information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)

#### Seeing The Silver Lining



Photo Credit: USFWS

While many aspects of our lives were on hold this month, it didn't stop people from getting outside. In fact, with businesses and entertainment venues closed, some people may have ventured out for a hike or walk in the woods for the very first time, and decided to do it again! The number of visits recorded at the Fort River Division for the months of March and April this year were **nearly double** what they were this time last year, in 2019. We are happy to see so many people enjoying the outdoors and look forward to the continued visitation.

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#### Signs Of Life at Dead Branch



We are starting to see some germination on the former site of the Berkshire Hardwoods site at the Dead Branch Division, where we removed over 20,000 square feet of building structures. We are in the process of reforesting the area to promote cool water aquatic habitat. In addition, the wetland habitat restoration is evolving as planned. Stay tuned for summer photos with fields of green and more sights and sounds from the wetland

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)



Photo Credit: USFWS

#### Fiber Optics Coming to Fort River



Fiber optic cable was installed down Moody Bridge Road in Hadley, MA, making it possible for us to connect the Fort River Division of the refuge. With the help of a contractor, we ran nearly 600 feet of conduit from the road, enabling us to connect to our shop building, the arena and the bunkhouse. In addition, access to fiber optics will allow us to live stream video to our website, another tool we can use to connect people to nature at the refuge.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS

#### Suspicious Activities At Refuge Locations



Unfortunately the refuge has observed some suspicious activities at two of its locations this month. Earlier in April, the trail counter used to record the number of visits at the Fort River Division was removed and placed underneath a boardwalk. Fortunately, the trail counter itself was still there. This data is important, as it provides valuable information regarding tourism and outdoor recreation, and can even be connected to budget allocations. Another case of suspicious activity was discovered at the Dead Brand Division, where someone had driven a dirt bike through an active restoration area. This activity disrupts the restoration process, and can hamper important ecological management. We hope to curb this type of activity by spreading the word about the harm and disruption it can create.

Photo Credit: USFWS

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### Connecting People to Nature While Social Distancing

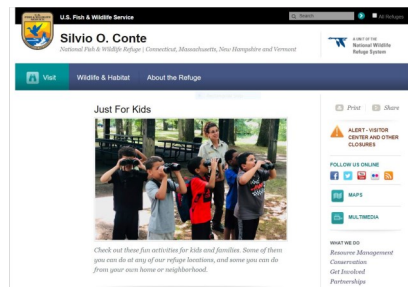
The month of April has brought an unprecedented experience to many of us whose jobs usually focus on being outdoors with people; lots of people! Connecting people to nature usually means spending time outside, in nature, getting our hands dirty and sharing these experiences with school groups, volunteers, and community members. Thus, quarantining and social distancing, while necessary for all our safety, has brought with it challenges that visitor service and other refuge staff have not experienced. So to meet that challenge, Conte staff took to using digital sources to continue our meaningful connections, and hopefully inspiring others to continue learning about nature and spending quality time safely outdoors.

Having to work from home this month, some of our staff have even used this time learn more about the nature in their own backyards, observing wildlife and spring blooms they may have missed in the past. So, if you have not done so yet, check our frequently updated Facebook page and websites for ideas and motivation to continue connecting with our natural world, whether it be right outside your window, the neighborhood park or a national wildlife refuge.

For more information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)



*Robin's nest observed while working from home.  
Three eggs and the mama robin  
Photo Credit: Jen Lapis*



*Check out the new "Just  
for Kids" page on our web-  
site.*



*An "eye spy" challenge on  
Facebook. Fun for all  
ages!  
Photo Credit: USFWS*



*Red trillium seen on a walk  
in the woods.  
Photo Credit: Jen Lapis*



*Connecting with our children  
outdoors while fishing.  
Photo Credit: USFWS*